DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 071 792 RC 006 674

AUTHOR Kuvlesky, William P.
TITLE Educational Policy and Rural Development: A Sociological Perspective.
PUB DATE Aug 72
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at Prairie View A&M College, January 17, 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Agency Role; Agricultural Trends; Cultural Factors; *Economic Development; *Educational Policy; *Land Grant Universities; *Rural Development; Social Development; *Sociology; Values

ABSTRACT

A view of rural development that is basically sociological in perspective and that hinges on educational policy is presented in this paper. Rural development is defined as social development of the rural sector and its constituent social units in reference to some desired end state. The role of the educational system, especially the Land Grant college system, in the social process of rural development is described. Major conclusions are that the priority needs for rural development are that the Land Grant colleges must escape the traditional tendency for single discipline, single focus projects and programs; develop a clear set of objectives for development that are based on the perceived life goals and needs of rural people; and develop a better understanding of how educational policy can be utilized as a development tool, and then use the knowledge to serve all rural people. A related document is ED 066 243. (PS)

TO: ERIC CRESS

ED 071792

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

RECEIVED
FEB 2 1973
NMSU
E.R.I.C.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

William P. Kuvlesky
Research Sociologist, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station
Prairie View A&M College
and
Texas A&M University

Seminar paper presented at Prairie View A&M College, January 17, 1973. This paper is a substantial revision of one originally presented at Third World Congress of Rural Sociology, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, August, 1972.

AC006674

INTRODUCTION

In accepting the invitation to give this paper, I gave as my objective conceptual exploration of the linkage between the two social processes of education and rural (human) development. I have tried to give a view of rural development that hinges on educational policy and programs and one that is basically sociological in perspective. To some extent, I also have tried to turn this framework in on our own Prairie View programs.

This should be considered a working paper, and I would appreciate written remarks on the contents by any who care to give them.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A SOCIAL PROCESS

"Rural development" has been given a wide variety of meanings and is, at this time, most commonly used simply as a pragmatic label, generally connoting a concern for helping rural communities, rural people, or the industry of agriculture. Currently it has become a common practice to invoke this now popular label to gain attention and even legitimation for research and action programs, with little regard for any special meaning or emphasis implied by the term. In my opinion, our first wave of "Rural Development" programs have, for the most part, represented just an extension of emphases and programs already existing.

Traditionally rural development has most commonly been used to refer to agricultural development in a broad sense or, more recently, "human resource" (i.e., economic development in a similar fashion). Currently it has taken on another strong dimension, that of community development.

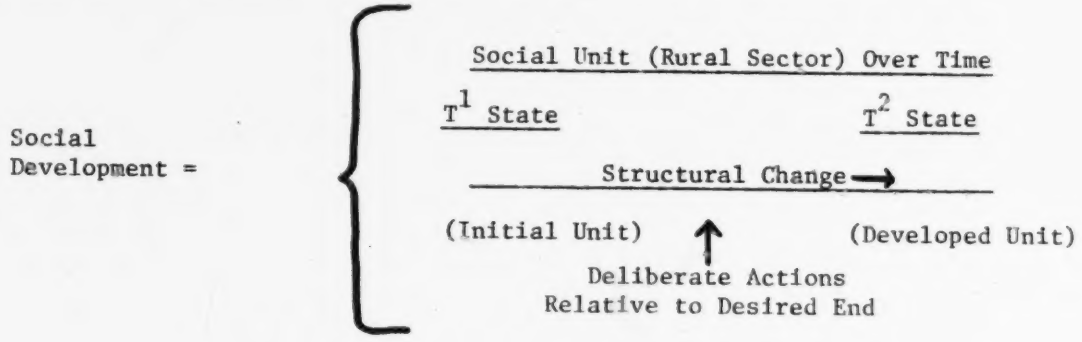
Clearly, in any hinterland area, the three foci mentioned above interact and are important parts of a broader conception of social development of hinterland areas and regions. It is my judgment, however, that the tendency to narrowly define "rural development" in only one of these specific ways impedes a clear conception of what is entailed in bringing about broad, lasting social change toward an improved state of existence for rural people. Most importantly, such narrow conceptions tend to bind us to many consequences of programs beyond those that are deliberately intended. Some of the unintended results may be of greater significance than the intended.

Rural development is simply social development (positive change) of the rural sector and its constituent social units in reference to some desired end state. This implies a macro, multidimensional perspective--the study of large areas or regions of society in terms of their constituent concrete and analytical parts and master processes (including political movements and economic relations). This perspective includes a wholistic tendency, a concern with the whole system and with the complex interactions of its parts, rather than with the narrow, partial, and often parochial perspectives most prevalent in our collective efforts today.

Whatever definition is used, rural development involves at least two basic assumptions about social reality: (1) <u>society can be changed for the better and</u> (2) <u>this change can be facilitated through the application of understanding gained of society's structures and process by the social sciences</u>. However, beyond general agreement on these two points, divergence among would-be developers can be expected in terms of what needs to be changed, how it is to be changed, how fast should change occur, and who should have the power to implement change. The apparently discordant views

on answers to these questions are a reflection of the complexity that must be dealt with when societal development is viewed for what it is--a broad process of social change, having multiple consequences of mixed valence for all parties.

In summary, rural development can be defined as the process of deliberate changing structural patterns within the rural sector of society and between the rural and other sectors of society, relative to a specified desired end state. Visually the idea can be depicted as follows:



WHAT IS TO BE DEVELOPED?

What rural development means within a particular social context is dependent upon the nature of the values and priorities of the people in charge. Is the principal concern to be with development of a viable cohesive community or individual human potentials? Is the economic factor given precedence over social cohesion, or, are either (or both) of these given less value than development of individual human potential and life satisfaction? The way these prime social values are structured in a hierarchy of importance will have impact on the nature of the desired end state specified for the process of rural development. We need to understand clearly and precisely what the objects of rural development are. This, I think, is where the rural sociologist can play a key role. What is the desired end state of the concrete social

units to be involved in the development processes? What kind of structural changes does this imply in the nature of the existing units? What kind of negative, as well as positive, changes can be anticipated by alternative programs of rural development at the various levels of social organization involved? Perhaps simply making developers aware of the complex interactions involved and the multiple ramifications of any simple program for a particular class of units (individuals, schools, farms, communities) would help.

We have always had a tendency toward tunnel vision in our development programs. We develop homemakers, farms, and communities, but each class separately. Look at our current extension and research rural development programs at Prairie View and Texas A&M as examples. This doesn't make good sense! Where is the coordination? How do they dovetail into an integrated program with a common end? Do we even know what others are doing; do we care? An honest man will find it difficult to look closely at himself! But, I don't think our situation is one bit different from that in any other state in the U.S. If what I have been saying in this paper makes any sense, and if we are sincere about working for rural social development, we are going to have to find ways to relate research to extension and to break disciplinary boundaries so we can collaborate or, at least, integrate our work.

It should not be forgotten that the broad end of rural development is to improve rural communities and life chances of rural people. But, we need to spell out specific ends for particular places and particular people. Given that the definition of what is going to represent "improvement" is relative to some extent, we need to understand our clientel better than we do. Perhaps we need more highly focused, small, intensive studies linked to action programs.

EDUCATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Education can be viewed as a process (dynamic) or as a social institution (static). As a process, education can be defined as deliberate action aimed at accomplishing learning of cultural attributes by individuals. These attributes include Cognitive Modes of Operation, Knowledge, Beliefs, Norms, Social Roles, Skills, Habitual Patterns, and Understanding of Self. As a social institution, education refers to the complex of social structures within an identifiable social system utilized in the process of education. In this sense, education is an analytical construct and cannot be viewed as a concrete entity, corresponding to any single concrete unit or class of units (i.e., schools). Likewise, the "educator" and the "educated" are not restricted to the formal social roles of "teacher" and "student" respectively. There is, in reality, no system, role, or age restrictions implicit in the process defined above.

Educational policy implies a recognition that the learning of cultural attributes can be controlled, at least to some extent. This means that some unit or units can enforce direction of education over others (or some others) in a particular social system. Implementation of policy is then social control and implies use of social power (or threat of its use) to apply sanctions. A definition? How about this: educational policy refers to a set of general normative statements that are maintained to give direction to and regulate the process of education and to initiate, maintain, or alter the structural aspects of the institution of education. Effective policy exists at that lowest level of social organization within a society that has the social power to implement it (the family, the community, or the state). It is these

norms that indicate in any particular social context who is to direct the educational process, who is to be exposed to it and in what way, and what substance is to be involved. As an aside, it should be noted that learning of cultural attributes does occur outside of the deliberate education process through informal socialization and, therefore, even when rigorously controlled, offers no guarantee of total formative capability over individuals.

It is obvious to us that educational policy (if it can be assumed to be a cultural universal) must have an impact on all human and social development in any society, and derivatively on the social units included in whatever is defined to be the rural sector of that society. But the variable nature of the normative statements involved and of the process of their implementation from one location to another preclude any simple general statements about what should be done about educational policy to adhance rural development. Diagrams 1 and 2 depict some of the complexity involved in this process.

All communities have schools, school boards, and an "educational policy". Educational policy is structured deliberately to provide direction and limitations to the social process of education; it cannot help but influence the potential for change that can occur--both in the sense of the normative statements it embodies and those that it does not.

Probably no structural aspect of a society has more bearing on the nature and degree of rural development possible than its educational policy. In fact, I have argued as a result of my research on low-income rural youth, that the only hope for relatively quick and broad improvement of life chances of rural people in this country is a high priority, general educational policy aimed at better serving rural communities and rural people. This does not mean

Diagram 1. Complexity of Educational Decision Making: Levels of Social Organization and The Educational Process

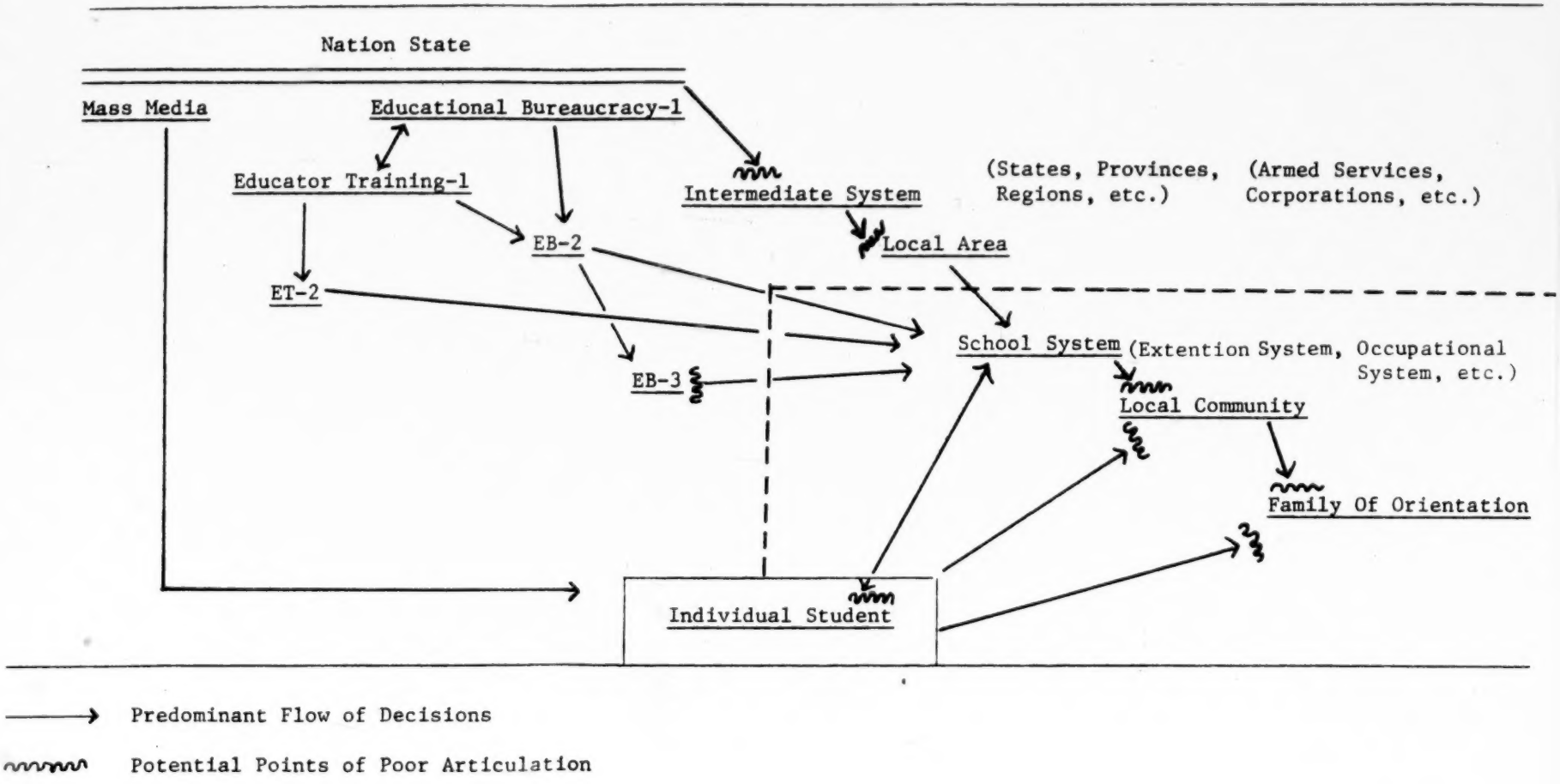
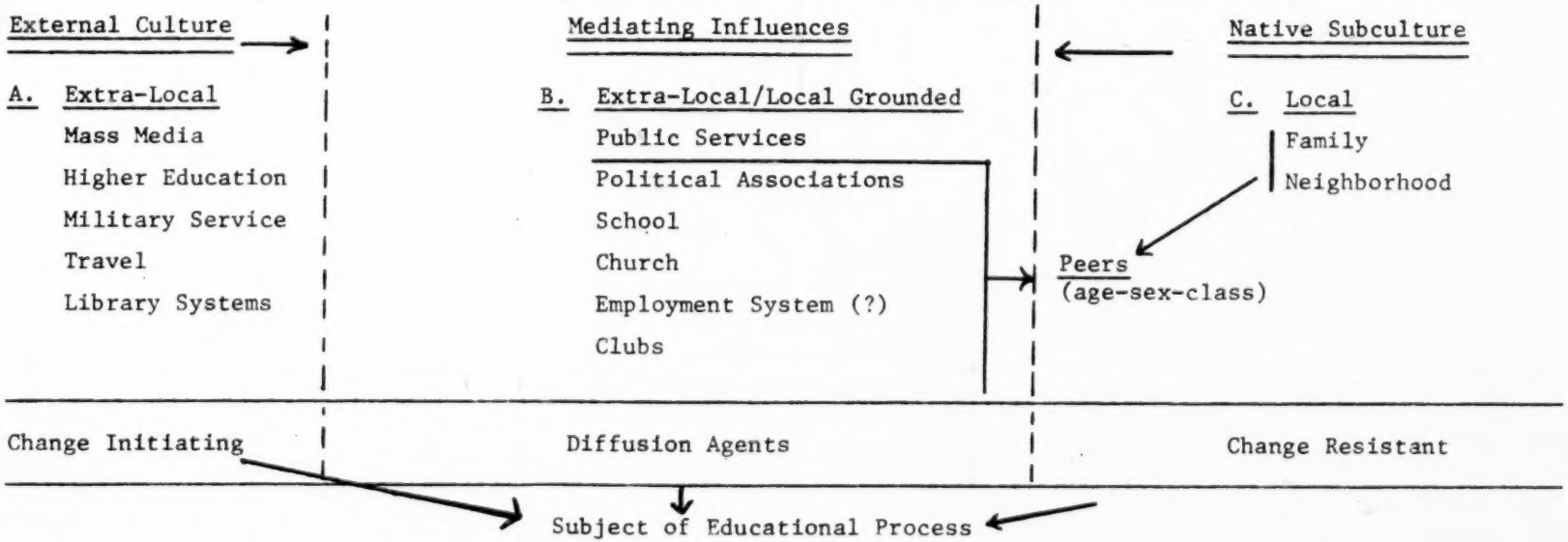


Diagram 2. Extra-Local vrs. Local Potential Agents and Agencies of Developmental Education



that there are not other types of policies and programs that would facilitate broad, long-lasting rural development, but only that they are not as important. This general policy needs to take into account all educational structures (not only formal schooling) and all segments of the rural population (not just the young) to have maximum developmental impact.

Social scientists have a role of some importance to play in assisting in the development of such a general policy, derivative programs, delivery systems and roles, effective implementation of all of these, and evaluation of their impacts. Education can be viewed as the most general and powerful direct force providing the stimulus for broad developmental change impacting simultaneously among units at varying levels of social organization, but to be effective as a developmental tool, educational policy has to be general, nonconflicting in its component parts, well articulated through the complex levels of social levels of social organization that exists in any society, and backed with adequate sanctioning power. In addition, it must be developed in conjunction with a clear conception of rural development which is comprehensive and inclusive in scope, but which also provides specific focus on particular target systems and delineates structural changes aimed for in these targets.

At the same time, we should not rest in applying our analytical understanding and conceptual tools to provide policy and program guidance to the developers and policy makers. We need to describe more adequately the nature of educational policy and how it is implemented. We need to understand better (and describe to others more adequately) how variations in other structural dimensions influence the educational process. We need to delineate more clearly the ramifications of deliberate change of a particular kind in one sector or subunit of a society for other sectors or types of units. We need

to lend our assistance to evaluate research of experimental education programs aimed at restricted targets or functions (whether or not we agree with them) so we can objectively evaluate intended consequences and reveal unintended ones of both + and - valence. Surely most so-called deliberate social experiments are rarely thoroughly investigated, and it is seldom when sponsors of a program will give as much attention to negative results as positive ones. Someone needs to be in a position to provide unrestricted, objective evaluation. We can fill this role.

CONCLUSION

The Land Grant college system was established and structured as deliberate policy to be an educational development unit. It has the mandate, the continuing resources, the breadth and depth of scientific and technical expertise, and the store of creative and leadership capability to do the job in developing the hinterland today. It should be the keystone of the educational process and the initiator of educational policy and mechanisms to lead the broad social change required to improve life chances of the people in the hinterland--and outside of it. The ideas I have presented in this paper give my understanding of some of the things we can do to realize our legitimate role as the traditional major development force in our society. In summary, the priority needs are three-fold:

(1) To escape our traditional tendency for single discipline, single focus projects and programs. Develop a macro, interdisciplinary perspective toward problems.

(2) Develop a clear set of objectives for development that are based on the perceived life goals and needs of rural people. Give

priority to social and human potential development on a community and area basis.

(3) Develop a better understanding of how educational policy, including that policy governing us, can be utilized as a development tool, and then put the knowledge to work in imaginative and innovative ways to serve all rural people.

Prairie View A&M, because it is just starting to develop broad support for independent research and extension programs, is in a good position to lead the way in Texas. Because resources are still rather small, it will be essential to establish a policy for our development operations that have specific objectives and clear priorities; and one that fosters cooperative efforts in coordinated and collaborative multifunctional and multidisciplinary constellations of staff. Once ruts are cut in the road, it is hard to stay out of them.